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THE NEW TITLE IS "POKETED BEACH TOWEL WITH PILLOW AND STRAPS".

FIELD OF INVENTION

This invention is directed to a towel or blanket-like structure comprising closeable pockets, a two-chambered compartment, fastening devices, and adjustable carrying straps to increase its utility, wherein the towel or blanket-like structure is useful for the beach, the swimming pool, a picnic, *etc.*

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

When engaging in any leisure activity that involves sitting, reclining or otherwise resting on a relatively unimproved surface, such as sunbathing at the beach, having an outdoor picnic in a field or meadow, or camping in the woods, a person normally utilizes a large towel or blanket device to insulate their body and belongings from the underlying substrate. One problem associated with existing devices is a lack of stability, which leads to their being easily displaced by wind or other mild disturbances common in outdoor environments. Another problem is that traditional blankets lack any means of supporting one's head while recumbent thereon. Such devices are also generally large and cumbersome to store and transport. Transportation is especially a problem when faced with the need to also carry a host of other belongings, such as a wallet or billfold, sunglasses, sunscreen, insect repellent, food or drink, reading materials, car keys, *etc.*

Numerous attempted solutions to these problems have been put forth. For example, a wide range of towel or blanket devices can be found in the relevant art, as shown in U.S. Patent Nos. 6,192,536 of Connors which issued on February 27, 2001, 5,774,912 of Dominique which issued on July 7, 1998, 5,729,846 of Sullivan which issued on March 24, 1998, 5,644,807 of Battistella

which issued on July 8, 1997, 5,499,411 of Wong which issued on March 19, 1996, 5,406,659 of Camp which issued on April 18, 1995, 5,361,435 of Reeves which issued on Nov. 8, 1994; 5,261,131 of Kilby which issued on Nov. 16, 1993; 5,072,467 of Hunt which issued on Dec. 17, 1991; 5,018,229 of Eberhart which issued on May 28, 1991, 4,654,906 of Roberts which issued on April 7, 1987, 4,634,618 of Greer which issued on Jan. 6, 1987; and 4,231,125 of Tittl which issued on Nov. 4, 1980.

Several of these patents disclose beach blankets providing for a pillow or head rest for the enjoyment of the user. For example, U.S. Patent 4,231,125 discloses a substantially rectangular beach towel to which strips of Velcro™-like material have been sewn along the lateral edges, the upper margin and a position approximately one-third down from the upper margin. These latter two strips permit the upper margin of the blanket to be folded inwardly and secured, so that a tube may be formed for the insertion of a separate inflatable or non-inflatable pillow. A similarly-formed tube-shaped enclosure for the receipt of a separate rod-shaped pillow is disclosed in U.S. Patent No. 5,361,435. This blanket also contains a "hidden" pocket into which valuables may be secreted, as well as attached straps for storing and transporting the blanket. U.S. No. Patent 5,729,846 discloses a beach towel to which a rectangular enclosure, permanently enclosed on two or three sides to form a receptacle for a separate pillow, has been attached along the upper margin. None of the blankets disclosed in these applications provide mechanisms for the storage of additional items, nor for anchoring the blanket to the underlying surface.

Several other patents disclose mechanisms for anchoring or stabilizing a beach towel or blanket-like structure against wind through the incorporation of various weighting devices. For example, U.S. Patent 4,634,618 discloses a beach towel around the perimeter of which a weighted cord has

been sown as a means of securing the blanket in the wind. This blanket may optionally have an attached carrying bag. The blanket disclosed in U.S. Patent No. 5,261,131 also uses weights distributed about its perimeter as a mechanism for stabilizing the blanket, but in this case the weights are created by sand or other similar ballast-like material that is inserted into a series of pockets that are arrayed around the blanket's perimeter. This blanket also contains a compartment for the receipt of a semi-circular pillow insert.

Several other blankets, such as those disclosed in U.S. Patent Nos. 4,654,906, 5,018,229, 5,072,467, 5,406,659 and 5,499,411 and 6,192,536 feature the use of triangular-shaped weighted pockets located at the corners of rectangular-shaped blankets to stabilize the blanket. In U.S. Patent No. 6,192,536, the pockets may open either along the inner or a lateral margin of the triangle. In some of the specified embodiments, the triangular-shaped pockets comprise two chambers, one of which may be filled with ballast while the other is used for the storage of small miscellaneous items. The blanket disclosed in this application also incorporates features that allow its attachment to other blankets, as well as a mechanism for storage and transportation of the blanket. In the blanket disclosed in U.S. Patent No. 4,654,906, the triangular-shaped pockets, which can be filled with sand or other granular material as an anchoring substance, are sealed at the outer 90° angle of each triangle using string tie closures. Weighted triangular-shaped corner pockets are also utilized for the stabilization of the blanket disclosed in U.S. Patent No. 5,018,229, although in this case these pockets are a receptacle for a packaged weight rather than loose sand. Small items such as keys or money may also be stored in these pockets. The pockets may either be permanently attached to the blanket or detachable. The triangular-shaped corner pockets employed for the weighting of the beach towel disclosed in U. S. Patent No. 5,406,659

may be filled with sand or other ballast-like material through a process of eversion and reversion. In this case, the presence of an additional pocket for the storage of miscellaneous items, presumably of similar design, is also described but its position is not specified.

In contrast to the above-mentioned patents, wherein triangular-shaped corner pockets are described, the pockets used for the anchoring of the blankets disclosed in U.S. Patent Nos. 5,072,467 and 5,499,411 are rectangular-shaped or envelope-like. The former patent indicates that the pockets may also be used for the storage of miscellaneous small items and discloses the incorporation of an additional large rectangular-shaped pocket parallel to the upper margin of the blanket that can be filled with sand to act as a weight or be used as a pillow.

None of the patents specifying the use of sand-filled pockets for stabilization of the blanket-like structure (U.S. Patent Nos. 4,654,906, 5,018,229, 5,072,467, 5,261,131, 5,406,659 and 5,499,411), apart from U.S. Patent No. 6,192,526, disclose an inherent mechanism for the storage and transportation of the blanket, although the blanket stabilized by incorporation of a weighted cord (U.S. Patent No. 4,634,618) does include an integral mechanism of storage. The blanket disclosed in U.S. Patent No. 6,192,536 provides a mechanism for the storage and transportation of the blanket and for its attachment to other devices of similar design, but does not provide a mechanism for stabilizing the blanket against the wind by attaching it to other nearby objects such as beach chairs or pool lounges.

Some inventors have described blankets that combine several of the above-described features. For example, U.S. Patent No. 5,644,807 discloses a beach towel with an inflatable pillow that is detachably secured to the towel. The pillow includes storage pockets. The beach towel further

includes straps which can be used for securing the rolled-up towel prior to its storage in a separate sack-like container, which also incorporates storage pockets. No mechanism, however, is provided for stabilizing this device.

The blanket-like structure described in U.S. No. Patent 5,774,912 also incorporates many different features. This patent discloses a blanket-like structure comprised of a rectangular sheet and a relatively smaller head piece. The head piece is a two layer section which forms a pocket into which the rectangular blanket may be folded. A belt attached to the pillow compartment is also provided for carrying the towel in its folded state. The rectangular sheet may also include pouches that can be filled with weights, such as sand, to hold the towel in place on the ground. No separate compartments are provided for the storage of small miscellaneous items, such as keys, sunglasses, money, *etc.*, nor is there any mechanism provided to connect the blanket to others of similar configuration or to anchor it apart from weighing it down with sand or other ballast-like material.

While these prior art blanket or towel devices at least partially satisfy their respective intended objectives, none address all of the problems that might be encountered when using a towel or blanket at the beach, pool boat, picnic, *etc.* These problems include the need for 1) a pillow or other form of head rest, 2) a mechanism for stabilizing the blanket against environmental disturbances, especially in situations where sand or other similar forms of ballast may be unavailable, 3) additional pockets to store various miscellaneous items associated with outdoor activities such as sunglasses, reading material, sunscreen and the like, 4) increasing the area of coverage by securing two or more blankets together, and 5) a mechanism for the easy storage and hands-free transportation of the blanket.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention addresses the problems inherent in the prior art by providing a pocketed beach towel with pillow and carrying straps which allows the user full enjoyment of their leisure time while avoiding all the minor problems that occur when using a towel or blanket as a substrate at the beach, the pool, or at any other leisure site that involves sitting or reclining. In one embodiment, the present invention provides a towel device comprising pockets, a pillow compartment and carrying straps. The general purpose of the present invention is to provide a single towel device that solves many of the problems associated with known towel devices.

The towel device of the present invention includes a towel made from a machine-washable material such as terry-cloth or other durable fabric. At each of its corners or distributed at regular intervals along its edges, pockets made from additional pieces of textile-like materials are provided. The pockets may be utilized for the storage of seasonal items or may be filled with sand or some other similar ballast material to stabilize the device against perturbations caused by wind or other disruptive forces. The pockets may also include a bag made from water-impermeable material that may be filled with water for weighting purposes.

In a preferred arrangement, the towel device advantageously includes securing straps, also made of a durable, machine-washable, textile-like material. These securing straps may be attached to the inner margin of the corner pockets or any other suitable location on the towel (*e.g.* the back of the towel), and may be used to further anchor the corners of the towel or to otherwise secure the towel to a beach chair, pool lounge, or other device on which one might desire to rest.

Centered along the upper margin of the towel is a two-chambered compartment made from additional pieces of textile-like materials. At least one of these chambers should be large enough to accommodate storage of the towel when folded.

Adjustable backpack-like carrying straps are attached to the two-chambered compartment, *e.g.* to the underside of the back margin of the compartment or to the inner surface of the back margin of the compartment or to any other suitable location on the towel, so that they may be used for transportation of the towel following its stowage in one of the internal chambers of this compartment. These straps may also include one or more devices to permit the repeated opening and closing of the straps.

Located along the top or any other suitable location of the lateral margins of the towel are fastening devices, preferably of the hook and loop (Velcro™) type, that may be used to connect the towel to others of this same type, thereby increasing the coverage provided by the towel. These fastening devices may also be used to join together the two edges of a single towel, to create a tube-like or sleeping bag-like device to provide greater protection against the elements, if so desired.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The invention will be better understood and objects other than those set forth above will become apparent when consideration is given to the following detailed description thereof. Such description makes reference to the annexed drawings wherein:

FIG. 1 is a top plan view of a pocketed beach towel with pillow and carrying straps according to an exemplary embodiment of the present invention, and

FIG. 2 is a view of the underside of the two-chambered compartment segment of an exemplary embodiment of the pocketed beach towel of the present invention showing the two internal compartments and one possible arrangement of the adjustable carrying straps.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

Referring specifically to the drawing, and in particular to FIGS. 1-2 thereof, a pocketed beach towel with pillow and carrying straps embodying the principles and concepts of the present invention will be described. More specifically, it will be noted that the pocketed beach towel with pillow and carrying straps comprises a large towel or blanket-like structure 1 made from a machine-washable material such as terry-cloth, velour or other durable fabric. As used herein, the term towel shall mean any such towel or blanket-like structure. The towel 1 is deployable upon a substrate such as a sandy beach, grass, soil or the like. As illustrated in FIG. 1 and in its preferred embodiment, the towel 1 is rectangular in shape and of sufficient size to accommodate one or two persons. However, the towel 1 may be of any desired polygonal or geometric shape, such as square, octagonal, or circular for example.

A plurality of pockets 2 are attached at the corners of the towel 1 or at regularly-spaced intervals around its perimeter. The pockets 2 may be made from additional pieces of the textile-like materials used in constructing the underlying towel 1 or may be chosen from a variety of other sources based on functional, esthetic and/or manufacturing and maintenance considerations. For example, in one embodiment, the surface of the pockets 2 may be covered with Velcro™

material to facilitate the attachment either of other objects to the towel 1 or of the towel 1 to other objects. The pockets 2 may be attached to the towel 1 by sewing or other methods such as gluing, stapling or heat seaming. The pockets 2 may be of square, rectangular, triangular or other shapes, although in preferred embodiments they are either rectangular or square.

The pockets 2 may be permanently closed along two or more sides by sewing or other similar methods, with the remaining sides either left open or made capable of being temporarily sealed. Devices used to seal the remaining sides include but are not limited to hook and loop (Velcro™), button, snap, zipper and other type closure devices. In a preferred embodiment, hook and loop-type closures 3 are employed for this purpose, and are located along the sides of the pocket 2 facing towards the edge of the towel 1. In other embodiments, the opening of the pocket 2 may occur through a sealable slit or flap located along one margin of the pocket. The pockets 2 may be utilized for the storage of a variety of items. Alternatively or in addition, the pockets 2 may be filled with ballast material such as sand, gravel or other granular material to secure the towel 1 to the underlying substrate and thereby prevent its perturbation by wind or other disruptive forces. The pockets may further include a component that may be filled with water for weighting purposes, such as, but not limited to, a resealable leak-proof bag.

Affixed within the pockets 2 are straps 4, also made of durable, machine-washable, textile-like material, rope or twine. The straps 4 may be attached to the inner margin of the pockets 2 by sewing or other such methods as described above, such as gluing, stapling or heat seaming. Alternatively, the straps may be attached at any other suitable location, such as the back of the towel. The straps 4 may be used to further anchor the corners of the towel 1 or to otherwise secure the towel 1 to a beach chair, pool lounge, or other device on which one might desire to

rest. Attachment of the straps 4 may occur through a manual mechanism (*e.g.* by the tying of the straps 4 to an extrinsic object) or through the use of hook and loop (Velcro™) type or other similar devices.

Located along the upper surface of the lateral margins of the towel 1 are fastening devices 5, preferably of the hook and loop (Velcro™) type, that may be used to connect the towel 1 to others of this same type, thereby increasing the coverage provided by the device. The fastening devices may alternatively be located at any suitable location, such as the lower surface or the lateral margins of the towel. These fastening devices 5 may also be used to join together the two sides of a single towel 1, to create a tube-like or sleeping bag-like device to provide greater protection against the elements if so desired.

Centered along the upper margin or along any other outer edge of the towel 1 is one or more two-chambered compartments 6. This compartment 6 also may be made from additional pieces of the textile-like materials used in constructing the underlying towel 1 or may be chosen from a variety of other sources based on functional, aesthetic and/or manufacturing and maintenance considerations. The compartment 6 may be attached to the underlying towel 1 by sewing or other methods such as gluing, stapling or heat seaming. Alternatively, the compartment 6 may be connected to the towel 1 by the use of traditional hook and loop (*e.g.* Velcro™), button, snap, zipper or other type closure devices. The attachment is performed in such a way as to preserve the patency of the internal chambers 9, 10 shown in FIG. 2 as well as the flexibility of the compartment 6, so that it may either lay on top of the towel 1 or adjacent to one of its margins. At least one of these chambers 9, 10 may be large enough to accommodate storage of the towel when folded.

The two-chambered compartment 6 may be of square, rectangular, or other shapes, and one or more of the internal chambers 9, 10 may either be open or capable of being closed using traditional hook and loop (*e.g.* Velcro™), button, snap, zipper or other type closure devices. In alternative embodiments, access to these chambers 9, 10 may occur through a sealable slit or flap located along one margin of the compartment 6. This compartment 6 may be utilized for the storage of items, may be used for the storage and transportation of the towel 1, or may be filled with sand or other similar granular material to serve as a pillow.

In one embodiment, adjustable backpack-like carrying straps 7 are attached to the underside of the back margin of the two-chambered compartment 6 so that they may be used for transportation of the towel 1 following its stowage in one of the internal chambers 9, 10 of this compartment 6. These straps 7 may be made out of terry-cloth, woven nylon or other durable, machine-washable, textile-like materials. The attachment of the straps 7 to the two-chambered compartment 6 may be made by sewing or other permanent methods such as gluing, stapling or heat seaming, or using removable attachment systems such as those previously described and well known to those of ordinary skill in the art. The length of the straps 7 may be adjusted through the use of plastic or metal adjustment devices 8 known to artisans of ordinary skill. In preferred embodiments, the straps may include one or more devices to permit their opening and closing.

FIG. 2 illustrates a close-up view of the rear surface of the two-chambered compartment 6. One particular placement of the adjustable backpack-like carrying straps 7 is shown.

The pocketed beach towel with pillow and carrying straps 1 according to the present invention can be easily utilized to isolate an individual from a support surface, such as a sandy beach or the like.

With respect to the above description then, it is to be realized that the optimum dimensional relationships for the parts of the invention, to include variations in size, materials, shape, form, function and manner of operation, assembly and use, are deemed readily apparent and obvious to one skilled in the art, and all equivalent relationships to those illustrated in the drawings and described in the specification are intended to be encompassed by the present invention.

Therefore, the foregoing is considered as illustrative only of the principles of the invention. Further, since numerous modifications and changes will readily occur to those skilled in the art, it is not desired to limit the invention to the exact construction and operation shown and described, and accordingly, all suitable modifications and equivalents may be resorted to, falling within the scope of the invention and the appended claims.